

From the tragedy these past months of the migrant crisis, one thing amongst many which I have been freshly and vividly reminded of, is the reality that our family of faith is world-wide - across cultures and boundaries, in deserts, in cities, in those makeshift churches in the Calais migrant camps, in bombed-out churches in Bagdad, to our traditional havens of worship such as this.

It's made me think again about how we see our Christian churches in relation to the communities they serve, and I have also thought about how those communities may view us.

At the heart of all of this, is the Christ whom we share with millions of Christians around the world, in very different cultures and situations from our own.

What sort of man do you see when you think of Jesus Christ? What experiences of life have shaped your journey of faith and your need for / approach to Jesus?

For some people, living lives on the edge of starvation has shaped their encounter with God...

For others, living in perpetual fear and permanently on the run as refugees from their own land has been the source of their encounter with God.

Different cultures and human experience – from oppression / liberation, expulsion, plenty, persecution, shape our encounter with the same Christ....

As Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, there was one image for all those around him to see, but I wonder how many different interpretations of that image there were in the hearts and minds of those who saw him?

The picture of Jesus on a donkey inspires a multitude of responses – what is it for you?

For those who were from Galilee and who were travelling with Jesus, there might have been cause for some regionalist fervour – always looked down upon by the city folk of Jerusalem, now the new champion / riding in the guise of the new messiah, was from their block! Now a Galilean will be king! At last, someone from the North!

Then there would be those looking at Jesus, then looking at the crowds all around – and seeing their chance for revolution against the Romans. How can we use this man for our aims and purposes of political liberation.....?

There would also be those watching Jesus ride into Jerusalem amidst all the palm waving and fervour... *'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'*....those watching all this with rising anxiety at the thought that somebody else might challenge their position of authority and power in their communities – someone else might take over the jobs and roles they had come to think of as their preserve only. There were plenty of Pharisees and members of the local hierarchy who felt this as they watched.

Perhaps for the disciples, as they watched in wonder at the reaction to their friend and were carried along by the excitement of it all, some of them, as they looked at Jesus, might have been thinking about all the power and prestige that would rub off on them by association with Jesus – the perks of basking in someone else's glow. Remember that very soon after this, at the last supper (Luke 22), an argument broke out between the disciples as to who was the greatest among them...

As we reflect on this familiar passage, let's remember that God gives us His Holy Word, not just as stories where we can observe other people, but as living testimony to His grace and mercy, which we can apply to our own lives and actions.

So, what sort of man do you see? How do you approach Jesus? What do you expect from him? Do you expect anything?

Lent 5 Palm Sunday – Rev Ian Tomkins, Advisor for Ministerial Support, Diocese of Bristol
20th March 2016 Ref: Luke 19.28-44 20/03/16

We don't know exactly what was in Jesus' mind as he entered Jerusalem, but his actions as seen at the beginning of our reading, suggest that he had in mind fulfilment of the prophecy of Zechariah 9.9, in requesting the colt and riding into Jerusalem on it.

Let's look at that prophecy – and see one of the threads of God's plan for the world, that spans the Bible.

Zechariah's ministry as a prophet for God took place in what is called the 'post-exilic' period, when the Jewish people had been restored to their homeland from exile in Babylon.
This particular prophecy being sometime around 480 BC...

'Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey.' (Zechariah 9.9)

Jesus was clearly giving a signal / message, that he was the one who fulfilled these prophecies. He was the Messiah / the anointed one of God...

But with a multitude of reactions to him, Jesus doesn't let the adulation or misconception throw him off course. It must have been tempting, because the course on which Jesus was set was the Cross and death, for you and for me - the only way for us to know release from the worldly cravings that daily stalk us – cravings for glory, fame, authority, one-upmanship...in all those different parts of life – family, village, church, work...

There's not a day that goes by when you and I are not tempted and pulled towards these things – in however subtle a way it might be.

So we begin Holy Week with Palm Sunday, remembering Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, and surrounded by adoring and cheering crowds, all looking at him with different emotions in their hearts, and no doubt some contradictory thoughts going through their minds.

If we were in that crowd, what might we be thinking, or shouting?

What hopes and fears do you carry this morning, for yourself, for your family and friends, for our world?

Well whatever it is, can I suggest that this journey into Holy Week is another timely opportunity for you to fix your eyes on our Saviour and to stay focussed on him.

From Palm Sunday with the waving and adoring crowds, through to that last supper with his friends, his betrayal, arrest, disowning, mock trial and terrible death, let's journey with Jesus, as he walks the way of the cross, and let's spend time praying about what this means for us.

At the end of our reading today, we hear that Jesus wept for Jerusalem, and this is a striking contrast to the joy of the crowds which greeted him. The city of peace didn't recognise what made for peace when they rejected Jesus and there were consequences for them, that they would have to live with. Jesus wept for them as he thought of this lost opportunity.

You and I have the advantage of knowing how things unfolded. So let's make the most of this Holy Week and Easter. Let's use this time – be it in Bible reading, quiet times of reflection, our church services, our prayer for other Christians in other places and cultures – let's use this time to stay focussed on the cross – and **see what you see** when you look at Jesus – Peace with God, and Hope for the future.